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POLL RESULTS

Would the Commonwealth Utilities Corp. be justified in imposing a fuel surcharge fee, in view of the continued increase in fuel costs?

YES-68

NO-422

*As of Monday, Nov. 15, 2004, 5:17pm

INSIDE



Spreading Violence

Insurgents stormed two police stations Sunday in the strife-ridden city of Mosul, killing at least six Iraqi troops as attacks spread throughout Sunni Muslim areas following the U.S.-led assault on Fallujah.

Page 17

'Too late on fuel surcharge'

FEBC says chance to impose fuel surcharge already passed



By AGNES E. DONATO
REPORTER

One of the largest customers of the Commonwealth Utilities Corp. raised questions yesterday about the legality of CUC's plan to implement a 3.5-cent fuel surcharge fee.

Citing comments from its legal counsel, the Far East Broadcasting Co. said the CUC board of directors lost its opportunity to impose a fuel surcharge when it failed to do so in October 1985.

Acting FEBC executive director David Creel based this argument on the only portion of Public Law 4-47 that permits the imposition of a fuel surcharge fee. The provision reads:

"The board shall determine to impose as of Oct. 1, 1985, a fuel surcharge fee of up to \$.035 per kilowatt hour for all consumers of electricity. Once imposed, the board may annually adjust the fuel surcharge fee to reflect the total costs of purchasing fuel for the production of electricity; provided that the fuel surcharge fee shall not increase for consumers of less than 2,001 kilowatt hours per month at a rate of more than \$.02 per kilowatt hour per calendar year."

Creel said it appears that P.L. 4-47, upon which CUC is basing its authority to impose a fuel surcharge, will not authorize the implementation of the FSF at this time.

"The plain meaning of the statute is that the board had one opportunity to impose the FSF and that one opportunity

See TOO LATE on Page 12

Senators and members of House Representatives meet with officials from the Commonwealth Utilities Corp. as well as from the Finance Department Monday to get more information about the proposed surcharge fee.

Lawmakers skeptical about surcharge fee

By LIBERTY DONES
REPORTER

Lawmakers remain unconvinced about the Commonwealth Utilities Corp.'s need to impose a fuel surcharge fee, doubting that it would actually be used for fuel costs alone.

During a joint legislative hearing yesterday, Vice Speaker Timothy Villagomez, who is also chair of the House Committee Public Utilities, Transportation, and Communications, asked for assurance that the proceeds would actu-

ally go toward the payment of fuel.

He noted that the CUC has projected a \$7-million increase in fuel cost in FY 2005 (compared to FY 2004) but that CUC's surcharge projection amounts to \$15 million.

Villagomez, a former Commonwealth Utilities Corp. executive director, took note that CUC's rate analysis is based on its in-house accounting since its last audited financial statement was made in 1999.

House minority leader Arnold I. Palacios said CUC's major problem

lies with its old and inefficient power plants, which result in higher consumption of fuel.

Palacios also noted that CUC increased its FY 2005 budget by \$2 million from last year's budget.

"I wonder if CUC is implementing austerity measures...so this [surcharge fee] is not for fuel cost. Why should the public shoulder these costs?" asked Palacios.

Senate majority floor leader Paul Manglona said the surcharge issue

See LAWMAKERS on Page 12

MPLA asked to delay action on Azmar

By LIBERTY DONES
REPORTER

House Speaker Benigno R. Fitial asked the Marianas Public Lands Authority yesterday to put on hold any action on Azmar's mining permit application until the company has satisfactorily complied with a set of conditions, including the submission of an audited financial statement.

Fitial, in a Nov. 15 letter to MPLA board chair Ana Demapan-Castro, said he requests that Azmar be given a 90-day extension to fulfill the conditions con-

tained in the MPLA's original 60-day conditional permit.

"Before MPLA actually grants Azmar a mining permit, I believe Azmar must clearly demonstrate, with overwhelming evidence, that it can meet its financial commitment to the CNMI. It must submit substantial proof of its alleged financial capability," said Fitial.

At the same time, Fitial suggested that MPLA retain an independent auditor to verify Azmar's financial standing.

"I trust that MPLA will properly



Fitial

engage in due diligence and verify the veracity of Azmar's financial claims before approving any mining permit application for the pristine island of Pagan," said Fitial.

The House speaker earlier introduced a bill that was unanimously passed by the House of Representatives, recommending a 90-day period for the conduct of a study on Mt. Pagan's mining potentials.

The MPLA board is set to reconvene

See MPLA on Page 12

Ayuyu recommended as Gardenia's receiver

By JOHN RAVELO
REPORTER

The Commonwealth Development Authority has reportedly recommended businessman Joe Ayuyu to become the receiver of the Pacific Gardenia Hotel.



Sablan

The recommendation came out after the federal court junked the bankruptcy petition initiated by Ronald Sablan, president of Sy's Corp. that operates the hotel.

Superior Court presiding judge Robert Naraja ordered the appointment of a receiver to take control of the corporation's assets and business

See AYUYU on Page 12

Local

Budget of three agencies kept intact

By LIBERTY DONES

REPORTER

The conference committee tackling the fiscal year 2005 budget has approved to keep the budget of three agencies at the 2003 level. This includes the Judiciary, which has a budget of a little over \$5 million; the Legislature, \$3.9 million; and Legislative Bureau, \$2.1 million; and the Washington Rep-

resentative Office, \$1.7 million.

The House earlier cut the WRO funding to \$1.3 million and the Judiciary to just \$4.9 million.

The lower chamber earlier raised the legislative branch budget to \$8.9 million, while the upper chamber raised it to \$9 million.

"We're using the Senate version with minor amendments," said committee co-

chair Sen. Joseph Mendiola.

On the legislative budget, he said the committee adopted a House provision mandating that retirement contributions of its employees be remitted to the NMI Retirement Fund within 10 days.

Mendiola said the committee hopes to finish the budget discussion by Wednesday next week.

He said the "big issues"

for discussion in the coming days are the funding for Public School System, Public Health, and Public Safety.

Meanwhile, acting Gov. Diego T. Benavente said it is important that the government gets a new budget amid a projection of additional revenues during the fiscal year.

"In a year like now where we are anticipating a little bit more, we need more money to

be allocated for government needs, and if the Legislature holds that, that just means that you're denying the Commonwealth [the chance] to use some of those additional funds," Benavente said.

He said the government would become "more accountable" with a new budget.

The administration had originally submitted a \$226-million budget, some \$13 million of

which were contingent on the passage of the Integrated Fiscal Proposal—an increase in some fees and taxes.

The House had rejected this and approved only \$212.7 million for FY05. The Senate then amended this and raised the funding level to \$217.7 million, taking into consideration some \$5.1 million in new revenue projections identified by the administration.

'Village council' nixes 'cannery expansion' on Asuncion

By BRAD E. RUSZALA
REPORTER

After hearing from a host of "experts" ranging from archeologists to water treatment managers, the "Asuncion village council" voted down the proposed expansion of the SWK Cannery by a count of 6-3 last Friday, citing environmental and cultural concerns that they believe would negatively affect the island.

"Cannery representatives" met with a large contingency of "islanders from Asuncion" at the Saipan International School and explained that their plan to expand the facility was meant to capitalize on the increased awareness of dolphin-free tuna in the United States. If given the go ahead, SWK would have provided jobs to the 40 people who remain unemployed on the island, tapped into an underground water lens, and doubled the cannery's tuna output.

While several groups acknowledged the benefits that the island would enjoy as a result of the increased productivity of the plant, a majority of the community was not in full agreement, and felt that the expansion was not in Asuncion's best interests.

Several groups raised fears that there would be an increase in pollution and a shortage of fresh water on the island, while others speculated that there would be an elevated probability of earthquakes and thus risk damage to the "ruins" of the "12th century Buddhist colony."

One of the objections from the "Tourism Board" was that the cannery "would make the island more like a city, and if Asuncion was to become more modernized then less people would be attracted to the island."

While SWK representatives did their best to answer the concerns of the community, the council was swayed by the

See VILLAGE on Page 12

PAPAYA
+GREEN

The Saipan Tribune accepts contributed pictures of Weddings, reunions, baptisms, and other community news. Please send to the following address. Material submitted should be original and not copyrighted, in digital or print format. Must include a caption containing complete details, description of the event, identities of the persons in the photo, the date, and the place, the name of the contributor, and a contact number. The Saipan Tribune reserves the right to edit the caption, the date of publication, and the size of the picture. Contributors can e-mail their submissions to editor@saipantribune.com. To check if contributions are received, call 223-6337, 223-2448, or 223-8740.

Island Snapshots

Benavente: Kagman has new water reservoir

By LIBERTY DONES
REPORTER

A stable water supply in Kagman is soon to be expected following the installation of a new water reservoir in the area.

Acting Gov. Diego T. Benavente said the reservoir, which can store up to a million gallons of water, was recently installed in efforts to address frequent water supply interruption in the area during power outages.

For many years, he said, water is pumped directly from wells into the distribution system, which has become problematic every time there is a power outage.

"The proper system is to pump water from those wells into the reservoir, treat the water there, and send it down to the community. That's what the Kagman community recently received," said Benavente, who chairs the CNMI Water Task Force.

He said the reservoir project was a CUC project, but he said that the task force intends to

duplicate the Kagman system in other parts of the island.

"What the task force will be doing throughout the islands is to remove the present practice of pumping the water directly into the houses. For instance, in Koblerville, if power goes off, the pump in the wells go off, and there is no water in every home. In the case of Kagman now, if power goes off, we should still be able to continue to have water service," he said.

Right now, only Kagman and As Matusi have waters pumped into reservoirs.

Meantime, Benavente urged the Commonwealth Utilities Corp. to explain issues to the public "accordingly."

He said he has received reports that when some residents inquired about the Kagman water problem recently, they were told to ask the task force.

"There has been a problem in the past so we continue to encourage and ask CUC to deal with the public accordingly in the

explanation of what the problem is—whether it is a power outage or a water problem. People are getting frustrated because when they call up, [they'd be told] to call the task force. It's just not the way to explain it to the community," he said.

He said that the previous week's water outage may have been partly caused by the introduction of the new system.

"Because it's a new system we're finding problems with it. But I understand it's been rectified," he said.

CUC said in a statement last week that the efficiency of CUC pumps in Kagman had greatly diminished and needed to be repaired.

CUC operates 13 water wells in Kagman. These wells pump to a 50,000 gallon tank and the water is boosted to a 1.0MG tank through three 40-horsepower pumps (two operational and one on standby).

Two months ago, CUC said that the contractor was advised

that the pumping rate of one of the pumps has greatly diminished and was asked to repair the problem under the project warranty. The contractor ordered the replacement part after learning that the pump impeller was already worn out.

Last week, CUC said the second pump experienced the same problem as Pump 1, leaving only one pump running now, thus resulting in low pressure or no water in elevated areas.

CUC said replacement impellers for all the three pumps have been ordered and expected to arrive shortly. Impel-

lers, CUC said, are not readily available off the shelf but have to be manufactured to individual pump specifications.

CUC said that, to minimize the inconvenience to Kagman residents, it installed a water standpipe near the four-way inter-

section by Santa Soledad where residents can haul water from.

Likewise, CUC is installing a temporary booster pump (taken from other booster station) to complement the single pump that is currently operating to meet service demand.

PHI

CAR WAS

Man hits woman's back with chair

hitting her with a chair.

Superior Court judge Kenneth Govendo imposed a \$10,000 bail on Towai, and directed the defendant to stay away from the victim.

Investigation conducted by police detective Christopher Leon Guerrero showed that Towai got mad after being told to go home during a drinking spree, which resulted in a heated argument between him and

the woman. The woman then slapped him once on the face because Towai was allegedly embarrassing her.

As the woman was walking away from him, Towai allegedly struck her back with a plastic chair and continued to beat her up. (*John Ravelo*)

Registration for .mp domain names extended

Saipan DataCom Inc., the registry for the newly available ".mp" top-level domain, has extended Sunrise Registration through Nov. 30, 2004. During Sunrise Registration, .mp domain names and the accompanying dotMP CS (Commercial Site) are available only to trademark and service mark owners. Open registration for dotMP CS and dotMP PS (Personal Site) will begin Dec. 1, 2004.

"Registrations have been brisk and companies and marketers are recognizing that dotMP presents a quick and effective way to get their brand and message on the mobile Internet," said Saipan DataCom president, Gib Bintliff. "We received numerous requests for an extension and realized we needed to give trademark holders a little more time."

An impressive group of companies have already registered .mp domains derived from their trademarks. Many of these companies are already using their mobile sites for marketing and promotion. Surf wear designer SOLJAH, and the Hard Rock Cafe recently combined radio ads and SOLJAH's dotMP site (<http://soljah.mp>) to promote events targeting youth and to get feed back from their mobile visitors. "Setting up our mobile site was easy and our customers loved seeing it on their phones," commented SOLJAH founder Alika Winter. "The response was great. Now we're working

up a new strategy for using soljah.mp in Japan. They're crazy about their mobiles."

The previously unavailable .mp extension is the only existing TLD dedicated solely as the address for mobile Internet sites and all .mp domain names include a hosted dotMP(TM) Commercial or Personal mobile Internet site. Unique dotMP mobile sites are automatically generated with registration of each .mp domain name. No site authoring or programming is required. Internal hosting and a proprietary device detection system ensure that all .mp second-level domain names (<http://soljah.mp>, for example) display properly on mobile phones around the world.

While the commercial version of dotMP serves as a marketing tool for business, dotMP PS (Personal Site) provides consumers with their own unique Internet addresses and their own hosted Web and mobile Internet sites. The consumer version also includes personalized Web-based Email, community and sharing features and direct photo uploads from camera phones. dotMP PS will be available starting Dec. 1, 2004. Pricing to be announced.

Saipan DataCom, Inc. is a Northern Mariana Islands corporation. The CNMI is a US commonwealth and .mp is the CNMI's country-code TLD. The company has been the administrator and registry for the .mp TLD since 1996.

**JOLLYBEE HALO-HALO
CMYK**

Three persons named to State Rehab Council

Gov. Juan N. Babauta recently appointed three individuals to serve as members of the CNMI State Rehabilitation Council.

Current Workforce Investment agency executive director Jesse Stein and Lino Olopai were appointed as first-term members while Public School

System special education coordinator Joanne Nicholls was re-appointed to serve another term representing required composition of Special Education Providers on the Council.

Each term lasts three years, with members limited to serve two terms.

"The Lt. Governor and I are aware of the difficult assignments of the SRC, but we are confident that you will consistently devote your time and efforts to represent the interest and protect the welfare of individuals with disabilities in their quest for employment and

independence," Babauta said to Nicholls in a letter confirming her reappointment.

A letter requesting the reappointment of Nicholls was submitted on Nov. 2 by SRC chair William A. Jones.

Stein was appointed to represent the State Workforce

Investment Board while Olopai represents individuals with disabilities.

Both will assist the Office of Vocational Rehabilitation and the Babauta administration in efforts with the programs and services for individuals with disabilities

who are seeking work.

The appointments do not require the advice and consent of the Senate.

The three individuals are required to file Statement of Financial Interests with the Office of the Public Auditor. (*Shan Seman*)

Chamber elects 2005 board of directors

At their November General Membership Meeting, the Saipan Chamber of Commerce elected the nine members who will direct Chamber activities in 2005.

Re-elected to a second one-year term is president Alex Sablan of Saipan Shipping. Also reelected to second one-year terms are Richard Pierce, SGMA/Safety First, as vice president and Jay Jones of

Triple J Motors as secretary. Michael Johnson of Deloitte Touche was elected treasurer.

New directors, who will serve a two-year term, are David Sablan of Century Insurance Ltd., James Arenovski of Delta Management, and Harry Blalock, KCNM/KZMI. Directors who will continue on the board in the second year of their term are Charles V. Cepeda, Pacific Trading Company, and Juan T. Guerrero of Juan

T. Guerrero & Associates. The Saipan Chamber of Commerce is the largest private business organization in the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands. Through business leadership and membership involvement in community issues, the Chamber continues to develop its role as a beacon for good business in these islands, the Pacific region and in business communities abroad.

SCC holds reception for USS Blue Ridge

The Saipan Chamber of Commerce sponsored a reception for some of the officers of the USS *Blue Ridge* last Saturday, Nov. 13, 2004, at the Aqua Resort Club, in an event hosted by Ambyth Shipping Micronesia.

The *USS Blue Ridge* left Saipan Sunday morning after a five-day visit.

The Navy personnel expressed their gratitude for the warmth and cordial welcoming that they always receive in Saipan.

"Both officers and enlisted men frequently tell me that this is their favorite port to visit," said Chamber executive director Christine Parke. "These

receptions are a great opportunity for military visitors to get to know us better. And I thank Ambyth for their generous hosting of this reception."

The Saipan Chamber of Commerce is the largest private business organization in the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands.



THANKSGIVING FUNDRAISER

Members of the Marianas Filipino Women Association, or MAFILWA, pose for a group photo. For their Thanksgiving 2004 Fundraising Project, MAFILWA members are selling scented candles and potpourris to benefit Guma Esperanza. For those who would like to help, call Minda at 286-4102, Malou at 483-8481, Josie at 235-4836, or text Olive at 788-8888.

CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

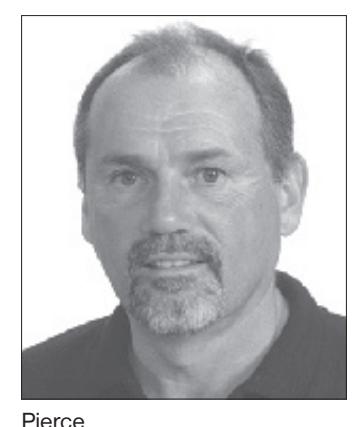


FESTIVAL PLANS

The OFW Advisory Council holds a meeting to discuss the upcoming Pinoy Christmas Festival 2004. The meeting was held on Nov. 11, 2004.

CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

Sablan



Pierce



Jones

TRIPLE J SERVICE
CMYK

NMC-CREES to teach processing of agri products

The Northern Marianas College Cooperative Research, Extension & Education Services will kick off a free, two-day workshop today on the processing of two agricultural products.

Acting NMC-CREES associate director and workshop presentor Edgar Cocker said 62 participants have registered for the workshop as of yesterday afternoon. He said more are expected to show up at the event, to be held at the Kagman Community Center starting 8:30am today.

"The purpose of this workshop is to teach people to develop more products using local resources. There is a lot of raw material we can process and market. The idea is to substitute imports with locally processed products," he said.

Cocker also expressed hope

that participants would better understand the importance and health benefits of *noni*, one of the products to be featured in the workshop.

On the first day of the activity, participants will be taught how to process *noni* juice, tea, and capsule. Tomorrow, the workshop will focus on the processing of vegetable and *da'ok* oil.

The workshop is sponsored by NMC-CREES and the Commonwealth Development Authority.

In an earlier interview, Cocker said the CNMI is losing about \$600,000 in potential revenues a year because of the local people's lack of knowledge in utilizing the *da'ok* fruit alone. He said *da'ok* oil, which can be found in different areas on island, is used to

make shampoo, liquid soap, skin lotion, and various other cosmetic products.

He added that setting up a *da'ok* oil processing facility does not cost a lot. He estimated that only about \$5,000 to \$6,000 is needed to purchase equipment for extraction, dehydration, packaging, and labeling of *da'ok* oil.

On the other hand, *da'ok* oil processing could be a lucrative business. The current market value of *da'ok* oil is at \$17 per 1 fluid ounce, Cocker said.

Another potential business opportunity for farmers is the processing of juice, tea, or capsule from the *noni* fruit, a popular dietary supplement.

Cocker reported that NMC-CREES recently received an order from a China-based business, called Beijing Mul-

tibio Co. Ltd., for 600 bottles of *noni* juice, with 16 ounces each. However, the order cannot be met because there are not enough *noni* plantations in the Commonwealth.

"There's a market out there for *noni* juice. The demand already exists; we just have to supply it," Cocker said. "There is a lot of available land in the CNMI. If you have one acre of land, you can plant as many as 600 trees with 5 ft. by 5 ft. spacing."

Cocker said the *noni* tree yields immediate benefits, as it starts producing fruit six months after being planted. Further, the *noni* tree generates fruit all year round.

NMC-CREES is now growing *noni* seedlings, which will be distributed to local farmers. (Agnes E. Donato)

HR group guest speaker discusses OVR and what it can do for the community

The Society for Human Resource Management has invited Felicitas "Tee" P. Abraham, director of the Office of Vocational Rehabilitation, to be the guest speaker at the Society's next general meeting. Abraham will be speaking on OVR and what it can do for the community.

The meeting will be held at Pacific Islands Club, Charley's Cabaret, Thursday, Nov. 18, 2004 at 11:30am. The cost is \$15 for members and \$20 for non-members.

Non-members in the business community, whether owners, managers or human resource professional, are invited to learn more about the Society and improve their human resource knowledge through the presentation and discussion.

The CNMI Chapter of the Society for Human Resource Management is the Commonwealth's foremost professional forum for discussion and training in human resource matters. Recognized as a Superior Merit chapter, the CNMI branch is composed of human resource professionals from a variety of industries, large and small, who recognize a need for a local society for professionals in the personnel field. The CNMI chapter is affiliated with the national organization.

Seating is limited, so members and others interested in attending this special meeting should contact Kim at 234-1234 Ext. 5403/5151 or fax number 322-0182 for reservations.

Fiji govt owes pension fund \$950M

WELLINGTON, New Zealand (Radio New Zealand International)—There is increasing concern in Fiji that more than half of the pensions savings of the country's workers is being used to pay for the government's growing budget deficit.

The *Fiji Times* reports that by the end of June the government owed the Fiji National Provident Fund more than \$950 million.

Statistics released by the ministry of finance show that over the past four years of the Qarase government, public debt levels have increased by more than 70 percent.

In the 2005 budget tabled last Friday, the government plans to borrow an additional \$220 million, more than 90 percent of it from the pension fund whose total assets now stand at US\$1.8 billion.

The Reserve Bank has banned further offshore in-

vestments by the Fiji National Provident Fund, leaving many hundreds of millions of dollars of pension money earning little or no interest.

Interest paid on members' funds has declined from 9 percent to 6 percent over the past 10 years and pensions have been falling while the age at which workers become eligible for a pension keeps rising.

In an editorial, *The Fiji Times* has raised concern about what would happen to the retirement funds if the government is unable to pay its debt or if there is another internal conflict.

The newspaper says given Fiji's governance record and political history, anything is possible and should be considered.

It says the government should ensure the safety of the pension funds and part of this responsibility should be to place a limit on how much it borrows from the National Provident Fund.

French exec calls for new Tahiti polls

PAPEETE, Tahiti (Tahitipresse)—The French government's representative on the Council of State recommended Monday that French Polynesia's May 23 parliamentary elections in the Windward Islands of Tahiti and Moorea be nullified, Agence France-Presse (AFP) reported from Paris.

The representative's recommendation to the judges cited "a serious irregularity" in the May 23 voting in Tahiti's Commune of Mahina.

That recommendation, in effect, set the stage for France's highest administrative court to rule by Nov. 23 that new parliamentary elections be held within three months on the islands of Tahiti and Moorea.

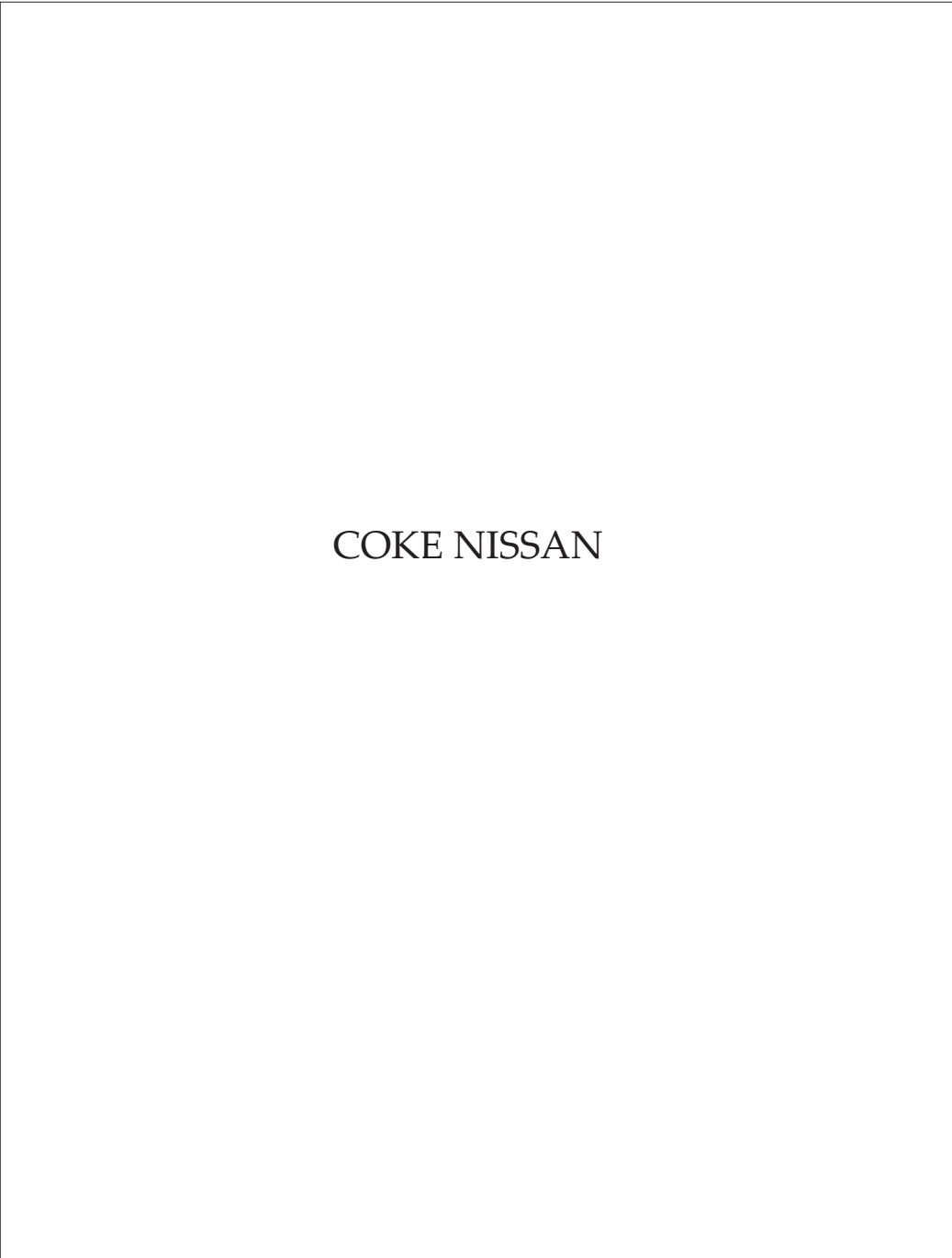
Since the May 23 elections, which produced a majority coalition that resulted in a change in French Polynesia's government, the Council of

State received several motions calling for nullifying the election results. Those motions came from recently re-elected President Gaston Flosse as well as former President Oscar Temaru, whose four-month-old government was toppled by a successful Flosse-led vote of no confidence on Oct. 9.

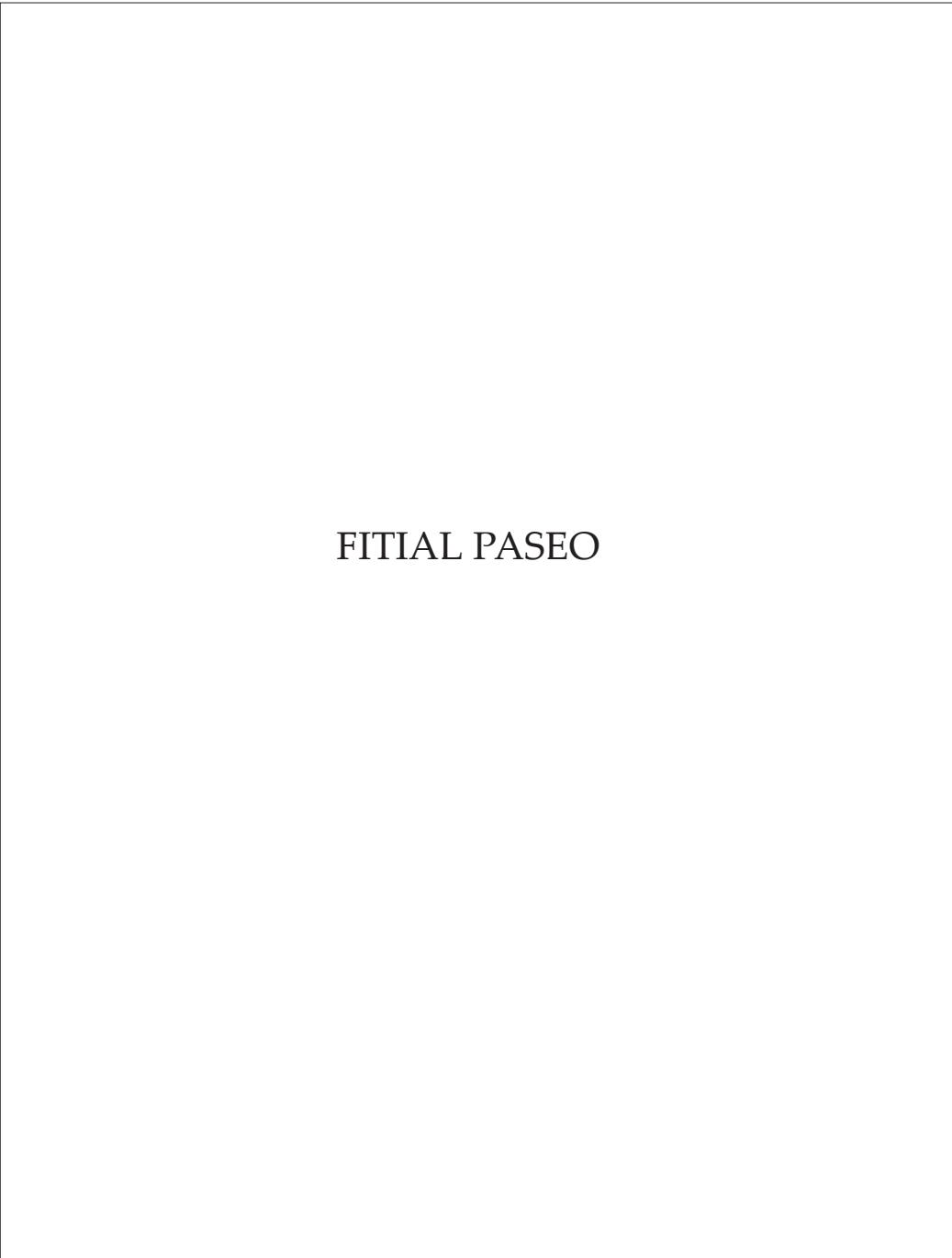
During Monday's Council of State public hearing, the French government representative, Marie-Hélène Mitjavile, who works for the court and not the government, retained only Flosse's motion disputing the election results in the Windward Islands, French Polynesia's most populous islands, AFP reported. This is where pro-independence party leader Temaru's Union for Democracy (UPLD) ticket outpolled incumbent President Flosse's pro-autonomy party by 291 votes out of the 85,206 votes cast.

MAZDA
+CMYK

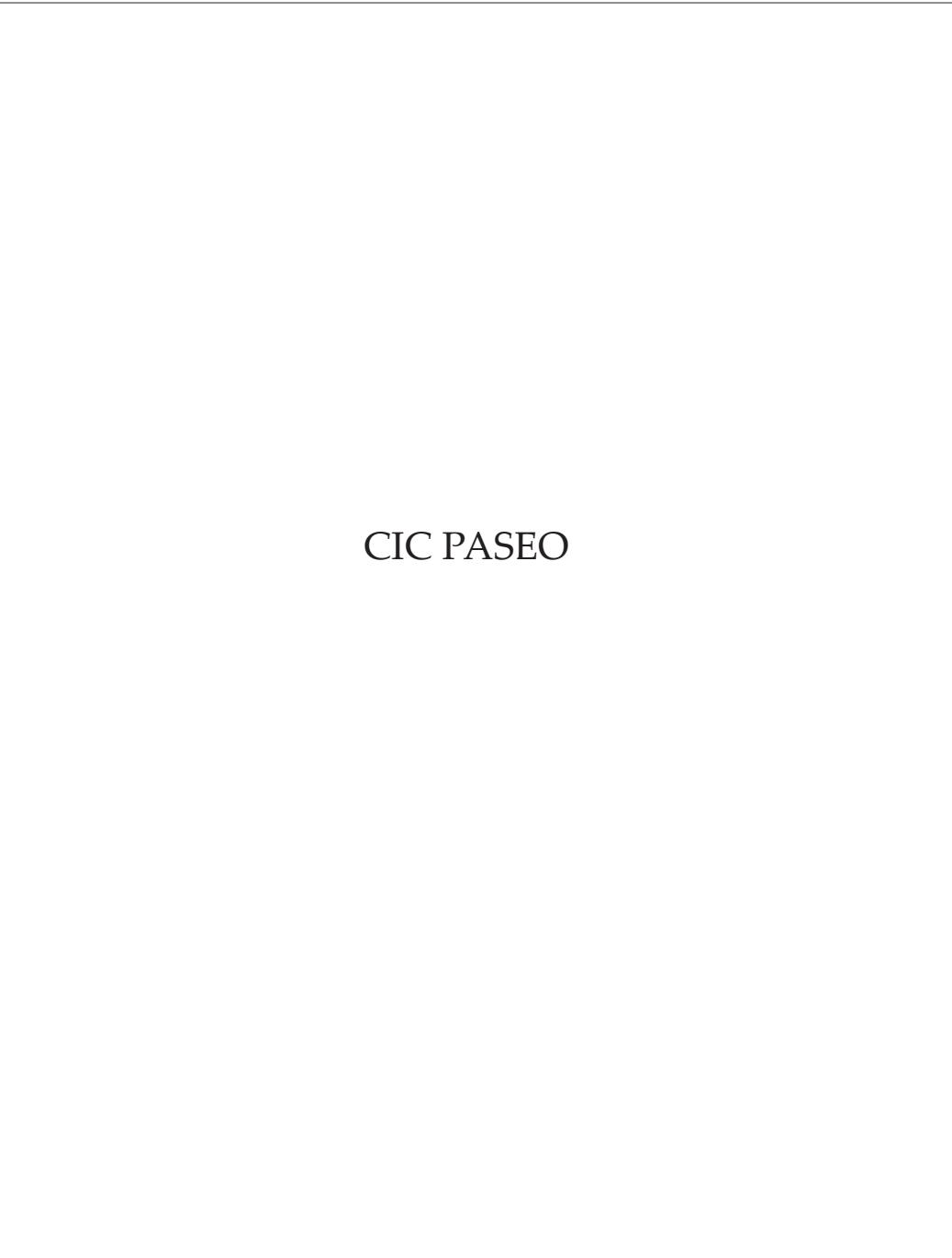
BOS GROW YOUR MONEY
CMYK



COKE NISSAN



FITIAL PASEO



CIC PASEO

Council urges use of concrete telephone poles



The 8th Saipan and Northern Islands Municipal Council has urged Gov. Juan N. Babauta and Commonwealth Utilities Corp. board of directors to consider using concrete telephone poles as they are more stable and durable.

The municipal council members said in a recently passed resolution that, although the installation of concrete telephone poles may be expensive at the initial stage, the investment is cheaper in the long run.

"Further, the members feel that with proper installation of

concrete telephone poles and lines with well trimmed tree branches near telephone lines and secured surroundings, private and government facilities will continue to enjoy public utilities service during typhoons. In the event of damage, restoration of public utilities service will be at greater rate at less cost," part of the resolution reads.

The resolution was certified by chair Gregorio V. Deleon Guerrero and vice chair David A. Indalecio and attested by secretary Antonia M. Tudela.

From left, front row, Lt. Gov. Diego T. Benavente; secretary Antonia M. Tudela; Gov. Juan N. Babauta; CUC executive director Loraine A. Babauta, chair Gregorio V. Deleon Guerrero and vice chair David A. Indalecio. Back row, CUC board member Allen M. Perez; CUC chair Francisco Q. Guerrero, and CUC board member Rufina P. Miles.

CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

Labor hearing officer orders probe against worker, agent

The Department of Labor Hearing Office has ordered an investigation against an alien worker and an employment agent for possible irregularity.

Hearing officer Herbert D. Soll issued the instruction as he affirmed the Labor director's decision to deny the permit application filed by employer Victoria Cabrera for worker Sarah G. Gascon.

Cabrera filed the application on April 26, 2004, but it was found deficient. On June 15, the Division of Labor issued a deficiency notice, but failed to draw a response from the applicant. The application was finally denied on July 8. An agent, Agnes Guerrero, appealed the denial.

At the Nov. 10 hearing, Cabrera testified that early in the year, her regular house worker had to return to the Philippines on family business. She said she did not want to be without household help for a period of months, so she requested a temporary employee.

The agent, Guerrero, brought her papers to sign it. Cabrera claimed not to have read the papers, but she said she signed them at the agent's direction.

Further, Cabrera said, she was not asked to pay the required application fee, nor any fees that arise in the processing of non-resident workers contracts.

She said she also never met the worker, as Gascon never showed up to work for her.

Cabrera's regular house worker has now returned to Saipan and resumed her employment.

The employer said she did not intend to hire anyone, but a temporary worker and when the prospective employee did not appear, she thought the matter was over.

At the hearing, she asked that the denial be affirmed and that she have no further involvement with the incident.

In a Nov. 12 order, Soll did affirm the denial of the application. He also ordered investigation against Gascon and Guerrero.

"It is recommended that the department investigate the status of Sarah G. Gascon and refer any irregularity to the Division of Immigration. The involvement and actions of the agent, Agnes Guerrero, should also be subject to department scrutiny," Soll said. (*Agnes E. Donato*)

Trading handbook comes in handy

Water quality trading has gained attention as an effective market-based approach for state and local governments to achieve cleaner water.

Because the concept of water trading is new and not commonly practiced, water quality managers may want to know if trading will work in their local watershed. EPA's "Water Quality Trading Assessment Handbook" is designed to help determine if trading can be used to make cost-effective pollutant reductions and determine if trading may be the appropriate tool.

Using a hypothetical river basin, the handbook illustrates a framework that may be used as a model in any watershed to evaluate problems and determine if trading could effectively address those local conditions. The handbook also illustrates how to assess the relative costs of controlling key pollutants and helps the user decide if trading would be financially attractive to watershed participants. General information about water quality trading and the handbook is available at: <http://www.epa.gov/owow/watershed/trading.htm>.

PHI GRAND

Opinion

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EDITORIAL POLICY

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Letter to the Editor

GCA, Eucon schools bag recycling contest awards

By JOHN RAVELO
REPORTER

At 10, fifth grader Antonette Labansa knows that some wastes could be reused to help maintain Saipan's environment.

Labansa, a student at the Grace Christian Academy of Saipan, said she has learned "to recycle things that are useful," after the school bagged first place in the government-initiated recycling contest participated in by public and private schools in the Commonwealth.

Some 235 students of the GCA collected a total of 18,040 lbs of recyclable fiber and aluminum, for a winning ratio

of 76.77 lbs of recyclable materials per student, to bag the \$550 first prize in the elementary school category.

GCA also received an additional \$172 for the 860 lbs of aluminum cans it delivered to the Lower Base Refuse Transfer Station's recycling facility, which pays 20 cents for every pound of aluminum disposed of.

For the secondary school category, Eucon International School bagged the first place, with some 25 students collecting some 3,580 lbs of fiber and aluminum. Eucon bagged the \$550 grand prize plus additional cash for turning over 111 lbs of aluminum cans.

"Not all things can be used just

once but twice or more," said 14-year-old Cheng Rong Shen, a 7th grader at Eucon.

The awarding of prizes for the recycling contest coincided with the Nov. 15 national celebration of America Recycles Day 2004, which encourages Americans nationwide to recycle and buy recycled products.

It turned out, however, that only six of 28 elementary schools actively participated in the contest. Only three of 17 secondary schools collected recyclable materials.

Participating elementary schools included GCA, Tanapag Elementary School, NMC Lab School, San Francisco de Borja, Gregorio T. Camacho

and Kagman elementary schools; the secondary schools included Eucon, San Francisco de Borja, and Cha-Cha Ocean View Jr. High.

"We're slowly but surely disseminating information about the importance of recycling," said Enrique Dela Cruz, Solid Waste Management's waste diversion coordinator.

"It's to educate children about recycling. Recycling conserves our natural resources and protects the environment. It extends the lifespan of the landfill," Dela Cruz said.

Dozens of students, lawmakers and government officials led by acting Gov. Diego T. Benavente and U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's Pacific of-

fice manager, John McCarroll, gathered at the Lower Base facility yesterday morning for the awarding ceremony as part of the public awareness campaign on recycling.

McCarroll lauded the CNMI government—particularly Benavente, the CNMI's Solid Waste Task Force chair, and Solid Waste Management manager Steve Hiney—saying that the Commonwealth now serves as a model for recycling and solid waste management among Pacific islands.

Hiney said recycling significantly reduces the amount of waste that goes to the Marpi landfill. He said about 30 percent of the average 160 tons of wastes on Saipan are being recycled.

MPLA

From Page 1

its meeting today reportedly to discuss Azmar's application, among others.

Demapan-Castro said the agency is studying another proposal to grant Azmar International a conditional permit to extract pozzolan from Pagan.

She said MPLA's management presented during Friday's board meeting on Tinian a draft conditional approval that would be proposed to Azmar for further negotiation. The

board, however, has yet to give its go-signal for MPLA to start discussing the proposal with Azmar.

Demapan-Castro said the board members have agreed to defer action on the staff's recommendation, as they wanted some more time to study the new proposal.

The MPLA board, on Aug. 17, authorized the issuance of a conditional approval to Azmar and gave the firm 60 days to prove its financial capability to mine Pagan pozzolan. But the MPLA did not send the compliance list until about a month later.

together to come to a conclusion.

"I left most of the project open to the students. I didn't give them any specifics. That's when they really started to think about the positive and negative aspects of the proposition," she said.

The "inhabitants of Asuncion" scoured the Internet for information, and even tapped CNMI government officials for their expert opinions. The students were so focused on the trans-discipline activity that Lamkin noticed a pleasant side effect in her classroom.

"I was telling my husband that I had 35 students in my class doing research and it was quieter than when I held a regular class with 20."

SIS Headmaster Dr. Dale Jenkins said that while the children had a unique experience during the past week, the hard work and efforts of the teachers was not to be overlooked.

"This was a chance for the students to see their teachers working together in a different light. It really was a tribute to the teachers who put themselves out on a limb. You had teachers talking about subject matter that they haven't had to deal with for some time."

After the decision of the council was made final, the floor was opened to the students and teachers to ask each other questions and to discuss the factors that ultimately provided the basis for their votes.

A poll of all of the students in attendance revealed that they were opposed to the hypothetical cannery expansion by a count of 30 to 19, with some 13 students undecided.

The project was the first of its kind to combine all of the disciplines with the different grade levels at the school, and Lamkin said that once she briefed the classes about the basics, the students were responsible for working

each other questions and to discuss the factors that ultimately provided the basis for their votes.

A poll of all of the students in attendance revealed that they were opposed to the hypothetical cannery expansion by a count of 30 to 19, with some 13 students undecided.

"Let's remember that I am an owner of this corporation and I have the deep-

TOO LATE

From Page 1

was on Oct. 1, 1985—the date that P.L. 11-47 took effect. Unless we are misreading the statute, this is no longer an option," Creel told Vice Speaker and House Committee on Public Utilities, Transportation, and Communication chair Timothy Villagomez in a letter.

He added, "The board cannot impose now for the first time—over 19 years later—the FSF. It also follows that since it cannot impose the FSF, it also cannot impose the annual rate increase permitted by the second sentence."

Creel, however, admitted that he might be wrong as his company has not had the chance to research the legislative history of P.L. 4-47.

Nevertheless, he said that if he was

correct, then CUC would need to obtain a new legislative authorization to impose a fuel surcharge before passing any regulation like the one CUC published on the Commonwealth Register last month.

"It will be up to this Legislature whether or not to give CUC such broad authority a second time," Creel said.

The Far East Broadcasting Company is a nonprofit, religious shortwave radio station in Marpi that broadcasts to China, Russia, and much of Asia.

FEBC is one of biggest consumers of electricity in the Northern Marianas, and CUC's largest customer under the residential/nonprofit category.

CUC data show that the utility firm has only one residential/nonprofit customer with power usage of over 100,001 kwh per month.

In his letter, Creel said FEBC pays

over \$15,700 a month in electrical bills to CUC. At the residential/nonprofit rate of 11 cents per kwh, this means FEBC consumes over 140,000 kwh per month.

Creel also noted that the implementation of the fuel surcharge fee in December would raise FEBC's electrical bill by \$5,000 per month. The group, which operates on contributions, cannot afford such a huge increase especially at such short notice, he said.

"It is not FEBC's intent to obstruct any lawful action by CUC. We greatly appreciate the power service which our mission so seriously depends upon. We are only asking that any rate increase be studied carefully, be found to be absolutely necessary, and that the public be given sufficient time to plan how to budget the extra cost," Creel said.

hour by next year.

CUC had earlier said that all electric customers will be charged an additional 3.5 cents per kwh in December.

In calendar year 2005, customers that consume less than 2,001 kwh per month could be charged up to an additional 2 cents per kwh or a total of 5.5 cents per kwh.

For larger users, the additional charge that could be imposed is unlimited, depending on how much fuel prices increase.

CUC currently charges a fixed rate of 16 cents per kwh for commercial users and 11 cents for residential and government users.

At such rate, CUC said that it is left to absorb the fluctuations in fuel prices into its operating budget.

Yesterday's meeting was co-chaired by Senate PUTC chair Diego Songao.

was never given an opportunity to negotiate this matter.

"We were not given a fair opportunity to work together because CDA was misled by a former officer, along with some disgruntled ex-employees who are hoping to take over the business," he said.

He refuted allegations that he took property belonging to the company. His own sister, Jeanette Sablan Yamashita, who claims 45 percent ownership of the shares in Sy's Corp., accused Sablan of pocketing business revenue for his personal benefit.

"I would like to clear my name on these false and damaging accusations. The only items I've ever removed from my office are family records and personal belongings that were not related to the company," Sablan added.

AYUYU

From Page 1

last Sept. 9 and scheduled a hearing to decide on the identity of the receiver from nominees on Sept. 13. The bankruptcy petition in federal court, however, temporarily halted the receivership proceeding.

In a media statement, Sablan said he was not opposed to the recommendation to appoint Ayuyu as receiver, adding that he could work with the latter.

"But the imposition that I will be removed completely and not be allowed on the premises is counterproductive and downright insulting," Sablan said.

"Let's remember that I am an owner of this corporation and I have the deep-

est interest in making this company work and [become] viable," he said.

"The best way to get the business back on its feet would be [to] work together and [share] our knowledge. All along, I've wanted to talk about how to improve the business with CDA, but have been denied the opportunity."

Sablan said that, while Ayuyu is acceptable to him as the hotel's receiver, he disagrees with the proposal to compensate the businessman \$100 per hour and a commission of "10 percent of increased revenues."

He also disagreed with the proposed \$7 per hour rate for Ayuyu's accountant, saying that the proposed fees would further hurt the hotel's cash flow.

Sablan claimed that the company presented various options to pay its debts and settle a delinquent loan but

Business

Administration calm despite dollar's woes

By MARTIN CRUTSINGER
AP ECONOMICS WRITER

WASHINGTON (AP)—America's trade deficit is soaring and the once high-flying dollar has sunk to record lows against Europe's common currency. But the Bush administration has reacted with remarkable calm to developments that raise worries about a possible dollar crisis.

Treasury Secretary John Snow, when asked, sticks to his standard comment that the administration's position in favor of a strong dollar has not wavered.

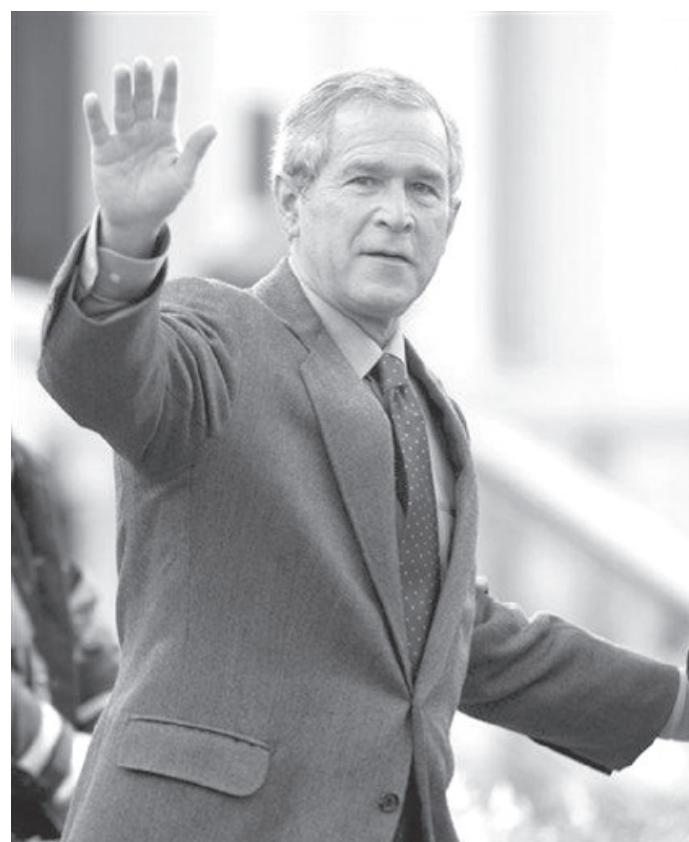
Beyond such utterances has come no single government action. During its four years in power, not once has the administration intervened in currency markets to support the dollar or done anything else to stop the dollar's slide.

At one point last week, the greenback hit an all-time low when it took \$1.30 to buy one euro, the common currency used by 12 European nations. That rate was down 8 percent from where the dollar stood in relationship to the euro just three months ago.

The slide means that a vacation for Americans in Europe is now more expensive, and European products coming into this country will cost more.

Most economists say the dollar, already down by about 10 percent over the past two years against a market basket of foreign currencies, has yet to reach its lowest point. In fact, some think the dollar needs to decline by 10 percent more to deal with climbing U.S. trade deficits.

"The trend to a weaker dol-



President Bush waves to reporters after leaving Saint John's church on Sunday, Nov. 14, 2004 in Washington.

lar is going to continue. The trade deficit is just too big," said David Wyss, chief economist at Standard & Poor's in New York.

The dollar's record low against the euro coincided with the government's report that the United States was running a trade deficit through September at annual rate of \$592 billion. That compares with last year's record \$496 billion.

As a result, the country is having to borrow almost \$600 billion from foreigners this year to pay for the imported cars, televisions and other items

Americans are buying.

Foreigners so far are more than willing to lend the money. The unsettling worry, however, is what could happen if foreigners suddenly lost interest in holding dollar-denominated investments. The outward rush from U.S. stock and bond markets could send stock prices crashing and interest rates soaring.

That is one reason many analysts believe the administration is taking the right approach on the dollar: insist in public statements that it supports a strong dollar but do

Tokyo stocks open up, dollar down vs yen

TOKYO (AP)—Tokyo's main index opened higher Monday, encouraged by positive signs in the U.S. economy that had sent Wall Street into its third straight winning week. The dollar was lower against the yen.

The Nikkei Stock Average of 225 issues was up 59.19 points, or 0.54 percent, at 11,079.17 points at the open. On Friday, the benchmark index rose 173.06 points, or 1.60 percent.

The dollar bought 105.43 yen on the Tokyo foreign exchange market at 9 a.m. Monday, down 0.67 yen from late Friday in Tokyo and below the 105.53 yen it traded in New York later that day.

Tokyo stocks headed higher early Monday, taking a cue from Wall Street's rally last week amid signs of burgeoning consumer sentiment and

nothing to stop the slide.

"The administration doesn't have any problem with a weaker dollar, but they don't want to say anything publicly for fear of roiling the markets and creating some sort of crisis," said Mark Zandi, chief economist at Economy.com.

As the dollar falls, analysts expect that the United States will start to see the benefits in its trade balance. A weaker dollar makes U.S. goods cheaper and more competitive on foreign markets. It also makes imports

stabilizing oil prices.

The index of all issues on the Tokyo Stock Exchange's first section opened up 5.49 points, or 0.5 percent, at 1,109.51 points. The TOPIX gained 12.89 points, or 1.18 percent, the previous session.

In New York on Friday, the broad Standard & Poor's 500 index posted a new 2 1/2-year high ending up 10.69, or 0.91 percent, at 1,184.17, its best close since Aug. 24, 2001. The Dow Jones industrial average rose 69.17, or 0.66 percent, to 10,539.01, while the tech-heavy Nasdaq composite index gained 24.07, or 1.17 percent, to 2,085.34.

In currencies, the euro rose to \$1.2991 early Monday in Tokyo from \$1.2928 late Friday. Against the yen, the euro fell to 136.84 yen from 137.18 yen.

pricier for Americans, thus helping domestic manufacturers.

For an administration that has endured the loss of 2.7 million manufacturing jobs over the past four years, anything that offers the potential of lifting the fortunes of U.S. manufacturers has definite appeal.

The dollar's slide has been most pronounced against European currencies, but it has fallen only slightly against currencies in Asia. That is where the United States is running its biggest trade deficits.

Secondhand smoke key issue in trial

WASHINGTON (AP)—Secondhand smoke can cause cancer. It's what the surgeon general says. So too the Environmental Protection Agency. And the World Health Organization. To the tobacco industry, however, the link is not clear. This dispute is a crucial issue in the government's trial against the nation's largest tobacco companies. The \$280 billion sought is the most ever in a civil racketeering case.

The trial, which comes six years after the states reached settlements worth \$246 billion with the industry to recoup the cost of treating sick smokers, is in its third month in U.S. District Court in Washington and probably will continue for several more. Testimony was to resume Monday.

The Justice Department alleges the industry engaged in a five-decade conspiracy to deceive the public about the health hazards of cigarettes. To win, the government must show the industry still is act-

ing fraudulently or is likely to do so in the future.

Proving that the industry is misleading the public about secondhand smoke could be an essential element.

"It's probably the best evidence available that the tobacco industry hasn't truly, fundamentally reformed," said Matthew Myers, president of the Campaign for Tobacco-Free Kids.

Government lawyers say the industry's denials about secondhand smoke are reminiscent of the companies' decades-old assertion that smoking did not cause cancer. That stand was dropped only in the past five years, against overwhelming evidence.

Cigarette makers say evidence tying secondhand smoke to lung cancer is much weaker.

"We think there's a legitimate reason to believe that this is not a done deal scientifically. It is not a closed case by any means," said Seth Moskowitz, a spokesman for Reynolds American Inc., the No. 2 cigarette maker.

Wall Street weighing retail reports

NEW YORK (AP)—It always seems a little premature to talk about the holiday season while the Thanksgiving menu is still in the planning stages, but there'll be plenty of discussion on Wall Street about December and shopping this week as top retailers report their earnings.

The third quarter was rough for retailers, with a slow back-to-school season threatening to override a strong September and a modest October. Earnings are not expected to be as solid as in other sectors, but most investors seem to have already made peace with that—or have already sold off some of their retail holdings.

So as Wal-Mart Stores Inc., Home Depot Inc., Kmart Holding Corp. and other retailers issue quarterly reports this week, the focus won't be on past numbers, but rather the outlook for the holiday season. Investors will be quick to sell companies that don't seem ready to make the most of the holidays.

Last week, stocks continued

their gains of the previous two weeks, though at a much slower pace. The bullish buying spree that marked President Bush's re-election and fresh signs of growth in employment gave way to more cautious attitudes.

While November and December remain the stock market's two strongest months, investors will look very carefully before buying, analysts said.

For the week, the major indexes extended the market's winning streak to three weeks. The Dow Jones industrials gained 1.46 percent, the Standard & Poor's 500 rose 1.54 percent and the Nasdaq composite climbed 2.28 percent.

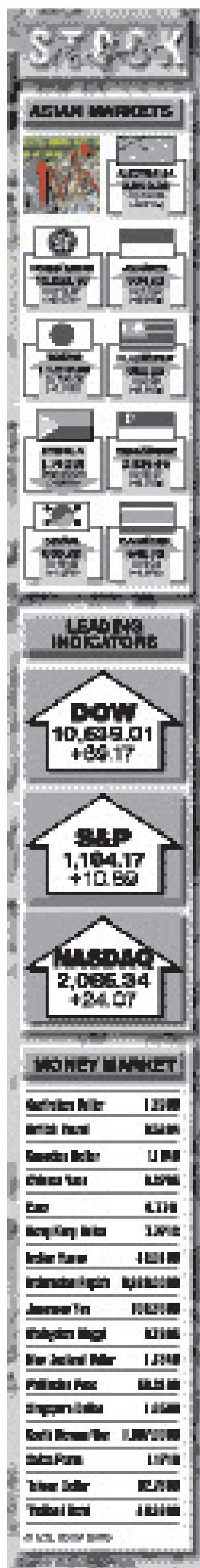
ECONOMIC DATA:

The government's October jobs report showed 337,000 new jobs created in that month, a huge boost that far outstripped Wall Street's expectations. But while the numbers certainly helped extend the market's rally, the report

also created fresh questions. New hires need to be trained, and that takes time, money and effort. And in the meantime, production can slip.

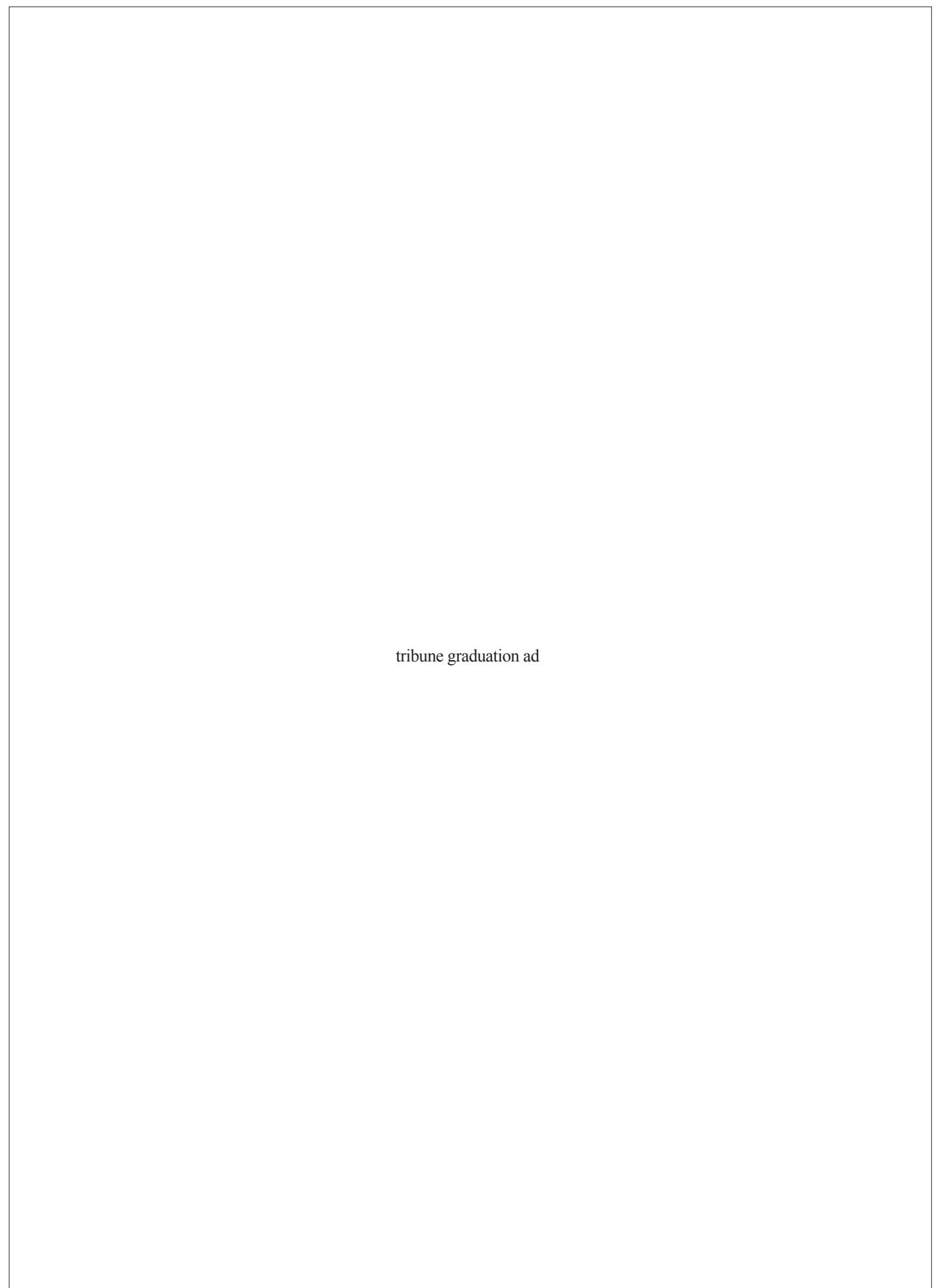
On Wednesday, Wall Street will pay close attention to a pair of reports from the Federal Reserve on industrial production and capacity utilization for October. The first is a relatively simple measure of manufacturing and production in the United States. Economists are expecting an 0.4 percent increase in production, up from the 0.1 percent hike in September.

The second report measures how efficient U.S. manufacturers are. Analysts expect a reading of 77.4 percent of the total U.S. industrial capacity in use. That would be a rise from September's reading of 77.2 percent. Stronger figures in both reports would show that new hires are being integrated relatively seamlessly, while lower-than-expected data would point to growing pains as America's economy gets on track.



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Life & Style

Does backlash loom against opinion news?

By DAVID BAUDER
AP TELEVISION WRITER

Is it time to turn down the volume on TV news? A handful of developments this fall suggest a brewing backlash against opinionated news, most personified by those cable segments that set people up to argue political points, or outshout each other.

One event drew a lot of attention: Jon Stewart's public scolding of CNN's "Crossfire" hosts. Others received little notice, like ABC News President David Westin's impassioned defense of objective reporting in a speech delivered at Harvard University.

Take a stopwatch to a day's coverage on a cable news network and measure how much time is spent on people talking about the news than on actual reporting, Westin said. Compare that to five years ago and he bets there's a lot less time spent on reporting today.

"There are very understandable reasons why," he said in an interview. "It is easier and cheaper and, frankly, more vivid and attractive to an audience to put on very

strongly expressed opinions."

TV executives are rewarded for it, too. Fox News Channel dominates its industry due largely to an opinionated prime-time lineup that took its cue from the growth of talk radio in the 1990s. "Hardball" is MSNBC's most popular show.

But Westin said there's a danger to repeatedly set up two people to argue a point without any real investigation into which view has more credence. Sometimes one side gets more attention than it deserves, he said.

"It looks like it's fair and balanced, and therefore is accurate," he said.

Instead of letting both sides simply trade accusations, ABC's "Nightline" tried to reconstruct events that happened in Vietnam 35 years ago when the Swift Boat veterans' accusations against John Kerry became a campaign issue, he said.

It was a disgust over this kind of format that fueled Stewart's cranky appearance on "Crossfire" Oct. 15, where he got into a bitter and personal tussle with Tucker Carlson.

Cable news has become a

street fight, Stewart later said on "60 Minutes."

"What has become rewarded in political discourse is the extremity of viewpoint," he said. "People like the conflict. Conflict, baby! It sells. 'Crossfire!' 'Hardball!' Shut up! You shut up!"

Sam Feist, CNN's senior executive producer for political programming, said he sees a place for opinion within a 24-hour news network. He doesn't agree that CNN has cut down on its reporting.

"I don't see CNN becoming the all-talk network," he said. "Nor should CNN be like Headline News."

Los Angeles Times columnist Michael Kinsley, a former "Crossfire" host, wrote this month that he's been pitching another approach. Instead of having opposing camps simply argue, the hosts' job should be to push them toward a common ground.

"The idea, in a word, 'Cease-Fire,'" he wrote.

So far, no takers.

The Project for Excellence in Journalism noted an interesting parallel trend in its studies of campaign coverage and pub-

lic opinion about the news. It characterized only 14 percent of newspaper and TV campaign stories this year as being straight news reporting. The bulk fit reporting into some narrative theme; President Bush tries to recover from his poor first debate performance, for instance.

During the 2000 campaign, the journalism think tank characterized 29 percent more of the stories as straight news, said Tom Rosenstiel, the project's director.

"The press becoming more interpretive doesn't mean it's become more ideological," he said. "But it may reinforce the

suspicion of the public that the press is writing what it thinks. It could encourage the suspicion of bias even though it's not evidence of it."

Westin saw the public's raw nerves in action last spring, when ABC News was accused of launching a political attack on President Bush with the "Nightline" special where names of Americans killed in Iraq were read. There was no political motivation, he said.

When ABC News is attacked, Westin typically asks critics to specifically point out any errors. "Almost uniformly what I get

back is, 'Well, everyone knows that you're biased,'" he said.

This all contributes to the idea of red states and blue states standing apart, its citizens glaring at each other.

Research this year showed how the nation's ideological divide had spread to news choices: By wide margins, Bush supporters favored Fox News Channel and Kerry backers turned to CNN. Some critics suggested the U.S. news marketplace could soon more resemble Britain's, with more news organizations that don't disguise a partisan bent.

Fate not kind to 'Apprentice' team leaders

NEW YORK (AP)—Maybe it doesn't pay to be a project manager on "The Apprentice." Chris Russo, 31, is the latest to be fired by Donald Trump on the business-themed NBC reality show.

On Thursday's episode, Russo led the Apex team to a big loss during a bridal store task. Apex made a profit of \$1,060.47 selling wedding gowns and accessories while the Mosaic team banked \$12,788.94.

"I can't believe you led the team so badly," Trump told Russo before firing him.

The stockbroker from Long Island followed in the footsteps (out of Trump Tower and into a waiting taxi) of Jennifer Cisarfulli, Pamela Day, John Willenborg, Elizabeth Jarossz and Raj Bhakta, who stepped up to lead and were then booted. That's six project managers out of the 10 fired candidates so far this season.

"The project manager is supposed to delegate the tasks," Russo told The Associated Press Friday. "But when (competitors) see one of the (managers) falter, they just swoop over them like vultures."

During the second season of "The Apprentice," most project managers have been selected at random by team members. However, Russo was picked by Trump to lead Apex after Russo told the real-estate mogul during the previous week's boardroom scene that his team didn't gel.



Chris Russo is shown during the Thursday, Nov. 11, 2004, episode of NBC's "The Apprentice," in this undated photo supplied by NBC.

"My big mouth was a ploy to become the project manager," he said. "Obviously, if I knew it was a wedding task, I would've kept my mouth closed."

Russo chalks up his unmotivated leadership - he told his team the task was "impossible"—to illness.

"The truth is I was sick," he said. "On the previous task, we had been working in the rain. That's not an excuse. That's just the reality."

Russo is feeling much better now. He's gained an apprentice of his own. Russo and his wife had their first child nine weeks ago.

obit

'Incredibles' derails 'Polar Express'

By DAVID GERMAIN

AP MOVIE WRITER

LOS ANGELES (AP)—Santa Claus could not conquer "The Incredibles." The cartoon hit retained the top slot at the box office for a second weekend, taking in \$51 million to fend off animated newcomer "The Polar Express," a Christmas tale that debuted at No. 2 with \$23.5 million.

The heist flick "After the Sunset," with Pierce Brosnan, Salma Hayek and Woody Harrelson, opened in third place with \$11.5 million, studio estimates showed Sunday.

Getting a jump on its full premiere next weekend, Renee Zellweger's sequel "Bridget Jones: The Edge of Reason"

began in narrower release and came in at No. 4 with \$8.9 million. The film debuted in 530 theaters, compared to 3,650 for "The Polar Express."

The horror tale "Seed of Chucky," a follow-up to the "Child's Play" movies about a bloodthirsty doll, debuted in fifth with \$8.8 million.

Hollywood broke out of a box-office slump that has lingered most of the fall. The top 12 movies took in \$136 million, up 11 percent from the same weekend last year.

Pixar Animation's "The Incredibles," about a family of superheroes pressed into action after years of civilian life, lifted its 10-day total to \$144.1 million. That matched the 10-

day total of Pixar's "Finding Nemo," which went on to gross \$340 million last year.

The film's revenues held up strongly, down just 28 percent from its opening-weekend gross, indicating it should have a strong shelf life through the holidays.

"I've always learned not to make long-range forecasts, but this is obviously going to go on to be a huge success," said Chuck Viane, head of distribution for Disney, which released "The Incredibles."

"If it happens to mirror 'Nemo,' that would be the best of all worlds for us."

"The Polar Express," based on the children's book about a boy's train trip to the North Pole, has grossed \$30.8 million since opening Wednesday. Directed by Robert Zemeckis, the movie features Tom Hanks in multiple roles, including Santa.

With a reportedly \$170 million budget, "The Polar Express" needs strong holdover business through the holidays to avoid becoming a box-office train wreck.

The movie received wildly mixed reviews: Some critics called it a potential Christmas classic and others said its hyper-realistic human figures resembled dead-eyed zombies.

Estimated ticket sales for Friday through Sunday at North American theaters, according to Exhibitor Relations Co. Inc. Final figures will be released Monday.

1. "The Incredibles," \$51 million.
2. "The Polar Express," \$23.5 million.
3. "After the Sunset," \$11.5 million.
4. "Bridget Jones: The Edge of Reason," \$8.9 million.
5. "Seed of Chucky," \$8.8 million.
6. "Ray," \$8.4 million.
7. "The Grudge," \$7.1 million.
8. "Saw," \$6.4 million.
9. "Shall We Dance?" \$4.1 million.
10. "Alfie," \$2.8 million.

Distributor Warner Bros. is confident "The Polar Express" will follow the usual pattern of Christmas family flicks, holding up well through Thanksgiving weekend and beyond, said Dan Fellman, the studio's head of distribution.

"Momentum for us is on the climb, which is exactly what our strategy was, to get ourselves some money in the bank and have some great word of mouth before we really hit the holidays," Fellman said.

"The Polar Express" also should become a perennial



American movie star Tom Hanks cries out "I love Tokyo" during a press conference in Tokyo Friday, Nov. 12, 2004. Hanks is here to promote his new Christmas fantasy film, "The Polar Express."

revenue producer on video and television in future holiday seasons, Fellman said.

Two limited-release films debuted strongly in New York City and Los Angeles. Johnny Depp's "Finding Neverland,"

in which he plays "Peter Pan" creator J.M. Barrie, grossed \$240,016 in eight theaters. Liam Neeson's "Kinsey," a film biography of sexuality researcher Alfred Kinsey, premiered with \$175,026 in five theaters.

Usher, Kanye West lead nominees at AMA

LOS ANGELES (AP)—R&B sensation Usher and innovative rap newcomer Kanye West had the leading nominations going into Sunday's 32nd annual American Music Awards.

Usher was up for four honors, including favorite male artist in both the pop/rock and soul/R&B divisions of the awards show, to be broadcast live on ABC. He faces the likes of Josh Groban, Lenny Kravitz, Michael McDonald, Prince, R. Kelly and "American Idol" winner Ruben Studdard.

Usher's steamy album "Confessions," which sold more than 1 million copies in its debut

week, was nominated for top album honors in both the pop/rock and soul/R&B divisions.

In the hip-hop/rap class, performer-producer West received nods in three categories: favorite male artist, favorite album for his debut album "The College Dropout," and best new artist.

Joining West in the newcomer category were Maroon 5 and Gretchen Wilson, who also was nominated for the top female artist in the country music division, along with Martina McBride and Reba McEntire.

Rap group OutKast, the big winner at February's Gram-

mys, was a contender for best group in both the pop/rock and rap/hip-hop divisions.

Veteran rockers Bon Jovi were chosen to receive a special merit award, and also were to perform during the show, along with Jessica Simpson, Toby Keith, Maroon 5, Kravitz, Groban, Rod Stewart and Snoop Dogg. Ringo Starr was to introduce a rarely broadcast performance clip of The Beatles.

The same male artists nominated last year in the country music category vied for awards again: Keith, Kenny Chesney, Alan Jackson and Tim McGraw, who won last year.

Robert Blake lawyers seek conspiracy theorists

LOS ANGELES (AP)—Robert Blake's lawyers are looking for jurors who love a good mystery and may be open to conspiracy theories while prosecutors are seeking conservative, common sense people who make quick decisions, according to legal experts.

Three and a half years after Blake's wife was shot to death outside a San Fernando Valley restaurant, the search for a jury to hear the murder case against the former "Baretta" star gets under way in earnest Monday with potential jurors facing the beginning of individual questioning by lawyers.

More than 100 prospective

jurors remain from the original pool.

Nearly 700 prospects were turned down because of hardship, some saying the estimated five-month trial would affect them financially and personally. Next, about half of the roughly 200 who said they were able to serve were dismissed for their strong feelings on issues including abortion and the question of Blake's guilt or innocence.

Jury consultant Richard Gabriel, president of Decision Analysis, said the defense will be looking for people who are "sensational minded," readers of tabloids and viewers of cable TV.

"You want people who are

open to alternative theories, people who are conspiracy theorists, people who will nitpick the evidence and create their own reasonable doubt."

On the prosecution side, said Gabriel, who is not working on the case, "They are looking for quick decision makers, conservative people who will use common sense."

Loyola University law professor Laurie Levenson said the ideal defense jurors would be people who read mysteries.

"The defense wants people who love a good whodunit and want to find their own solutions," she said. "The prosecution looks for people who are not star struck and who

don't believe in conspiracy theories. They want a jury much like the Scott Peterson jury—people who are comfortable with circumstantial evidence."

Peterson was convicted Friday of murdering his pregnant wife and her fetus. His jury now must decide whether he should be sentenced to death or life in prison without parole.

Levenson noted that in recent months Blake's case has been eclipsed by those of other high-profile defendants including Peterson, Kobe Bryant and Michael Jackson.

"It has gone off the radar for many people, but now it's likely to come back," she said.

WALLACE

British stars gather for Band Aid remake

LONDON (AP)—Some of Britain's biggest pop stars gathered Sunday to record a new version of the hugely successful 1984 fund-raising hit "Do They Know It's Christmas?" being rereleased this year to benefit victims of violence in Sudan.

Coldplay's Chris Martin, Jamelia, Ms. Dynamite, Will Young and members of the bands Busted, the Darkness and Sugababes were all part of the project, called Band Aid 20.

Paul McCartney, U2's

Bono, Dido and Robbie Williams also participated in the new version, making their contributions ahead of time.

"It sounds gaudy, but I guess there is a legacy," said Bob Geldof, who wrote "Do They Know It's Christmas?" in 1984 with Midge Ure, for a superstar group they called Band Aid.

The original record raised millions for those starving in Ethiopia.

Geldof and Ure organized this year's effort, which will benefit

those suffering in the Darfur region of Sudan. The song is due out Nov. 29.

Geldof, who also planned the 1985 Live Aid concerts and has been knighted for his activism, said he hoped the new recording would spur Britain's government to use its 2005 stints heading the European Union and the G8 group of wealthy nations to



Geldof

improve life for those in poor countries.

"The reality is that only politics created this dilemma and only politics can resolve it," he said.

Among those who participated in the 1984 recording were Boy George, George Michael, Sting, Phil Collins, Bono and the members of Duran Duran, Bananarama and Spandau Ballet.

Authorities seek cause of O.D.B.'s death

NEW YORK (AP)—Autopsy results for the rapper known as O.D.B., who died at a Manhattan recording studio, will not be available for several days while authorities conduct medical tests, officials said Sunday.

Results of the tests could take more than a week, said Ellen Borakove, a spokeswoman for the New York City medical examiner's office.

O.D.B., whose legal name was Russell Jones, complained of chest pains before collaps-

ing Saturday at the Manhattan studio. He was dead by the time paramedics reached him, said Gabe Tesoriero, a spokesman for Roc-a-Fella records.

The cause of death was not immediately clear, but O.D.B. had recently finished a prison sentence for drug possession and escaping a rehab clinic. He would have turned 36 on Monday.

Meanwhile, the music world on Sunday mourned the rapper's death as many of the industry's

stars gathered in Los Angeles for the 32nd annual American Music Awards.

O.D.B., also known as Ol' Dirty Bastard, was a founding member of the rap group the Wu-Tang Clan.

With his unorthodox delivery—alternately slurred, hyper and nonsensical—O.D.B. stood out even in the nine-man Clan, and as a solo artist he released hit singles such as "Shimmy Shimmy My Ya" and "Got Your Money."

He had been working on his

comeback album for more than a year and was almost finished, Tesoriero said.

Information about funeral plans was not immediately available.

O.D.B. was the latest in a string of rappers to meet an untimely death, among them Jam Master Jay of Run DMC, who was fatally shot in late 2002, and Notorious B.I.G. and Tupac Shakur, who were both shot to death in the late 1990s. Those killings remain unsolved.

Creator of superhero 'The Flash' dies

BOCA RATON, Fla. (AP)—Harry Lampert, the illustrator who created the DC Comics superhero 'The Flash' and later became known for his instructional books on bridge, died Saturday. He was 88.

Lampert, who had been suffering from cancer, died at Boca Raton Community Hospital, according to his family.

He began drawing professionally at 16, inking cartoons at Fleischer Studios in New York for characters such as Popeye, Betty Boop and KoKo the Clown.

Six years later, Lampert created the DC Comics original "Flash Comics 1" in 1940, collaborating with writer Gardner Fox. The first-edition featuring the physics-defying superhero has become a classic among comic book collectors.

"He based it on the character in mythology (Hermes) ... the wings on his feet," said daughter Karen Lampert Akavan. "He had no idea how big it would be."

Lampert received a steady stream of fan mail and requests for his early 'Flash' drawings. But his favorite illustrations were gag cartoons, which appeared in publications including Time, Esquire, The New York Times, Saturday Evening Post and Saturday Review.

"Up to the last week he was redrawing 'The Flash' and selling it to people," his daughter said.

Lampert spent much of his life as a cartoonist, and he taught at the New York School of Visual Arts. He also started an advertising agency in New York, which won several awards, including The Golden Lion at Cannes.

MARQUETTE, Mich. (AP)—Entertainer Bill Cosby poked fun at Michigan's Upper Peninsula in a performance at Northern Michigan University. "Why are you people up here?" Cosby asked the crowd of more than 6,800 people Friday night at the Berry Events Center. "Didn't you know there was nothing up here when you came to visit the campus?

"I called my wife before the

show, and she asked what it was like up here, and I said, 'I don't know where I'm at.' It's an eight-hour drive from downtown."

Marquette, with a population of about 20,000, is the Upper Peninsula's largest city. Cosby's routine included jokes about college life, relationships,

and parents and children. "I don't care who you are or how much money you make, men, when you take your child to college, you will carry luggage up three flights of stairs while your wife and daughter pretend they're looking at the architecture of the campus," Cosby said.

Star Jones gets married in glitzy bash



NEW YORK (AP)—Star Jones, co-host of ABC's "The View," married banker Al Reynolds in a star-studded Park Avenue bash. Notables ranging from Spike Lee to Sen. Hillary Clinton packed into St. Bartholomew's Church Saturday to watch Jones, 42, who wore a designer strapless wedding dress with a 27-foot train, exchange vows with Reynolds.

"The train was so long it took about seven people to carry it," said friend and guest Valerie Simpson, songwriter and half of the R&B duo Ashford and Simpson.

With songstress Patti LaBelle performing, and a bridal party including Natalie Cole, Vivica A. Fox and Holly Robinson Peete, the storybook wedding lasted until 8 p.m. before moving to the Waldorf-Astoria Hotel for an equally celebrity-heavy reception.

"I smiled a lot," said Jones' "The View" co-host Barbara Walters. "I was happy for her. She had the biggest smile I've ever seen."

Star Jones, co-host of ABC's "The View," and banker Al Reynolds walk down the aisle at their wedding in New York Saturday, Nov. 13, 2004.

AP

List of warning signs helps woman recognize abuser

By ABIGAIL VAN BUREN

DEAR ABBY: In 1996, in memory of a 19-year-old battered woman who was murdered by her boyfriend, you printed an item requested by her family. It changed my life. On March 29 of that year, my dad said, "I have something for you," and handed me your column. It contained a list of 15 warning signs of a batterer. It was my wake-up call.

At first I thought, "How can this help ME?" Well, it did. No. 1 took me back to the beginning of my relationship with my fiance. By the time I reached No. 15, I had reviewed the past seven years of my life.

Few realize how important a role verbal abuse and criticism play in an abuser's efforts to gain control and keep you from leaving. The verbal abuse was harder for me to deal with than being kicked in the back when I'd walk away from one of his outbursts.

After reading that column, I finally understood there was nothing I could change about myself that would make him love me. Thank you, Abby. I wish I could let the family of the 19-year-old woman know they changed my life.

GRATEFUL IN ILLINOIS

DEAR GRATEFUL: People often ask if I ever hear from readers letting me know how my columns have affected them. The answer is yes, and today I'll reprint that list in YOUR honor.

(1) PUSHES FOR QUICK INVOLVEMENT: Comes on strong, claiming, "I've never felt loved like this by anyone." An abuser pressures the new partner for an exclusive commitment almost immediately.

(2) JEALOUS: Excessively possessive; calls constantly or visits unexpectedly; prevents you from going to work because "you might meet someone"; checks the mileage on your car.

(3) CONTROLLING: Interrogates you intensely (especially if you're late) about whom you talked to and where you were; keeps all the money; insists you ask permission to go anywhere or do anything.

(4) UNREALISTIC EXPECTATIONS: Expects you to be the perfect mate and meet his or her every need.

(5) ISOLATION: Tries to cut you off from family and friends; accuses people who are your supporters of "causing trouble." The abuser may deprive you of a phone or car, or try to prevent you from holding a job.

(6) BLAMES OTHERS FOR PROBLEMS OR MISTAKES: It's always someone else's fault if something goes wrong.

(7) MAKES OTHERS RESPONSIBLE FOR HIS OR HER FEELINGS: The abuser says, "You make me angry," instead of "I am angry," or says, "You're hurting me by not doing what I tell you."

(8) HYPERSENSITIVITY: Is easily insulted, claiming hurt feelings when he or she is really mad. Rants about the injustice of things that are just a part of life.

(9) CRUELTY TO ANIMALS OR CHILDREN: Kills or punishes animals brutally. Also may expect children to do things that are far beyond their ability (whips a 3-year-old for wetting a diaper) or may tease them until they cry. Sixty-five percent of abusers who beat their partner will also abuse children.

(10) "PLAYFUL" USE OF FORCE DURING SEX: Enjoys throwing you down or holding you down against your will during sex; finds the idea of rape exciting.

(11) VERBAL ABUSE: Constantly criticizes or says blatantly cruel things; degrades, curses, calls you ugly names. This may also involve sleep deprivation, waking you with relentless verbal abuse.

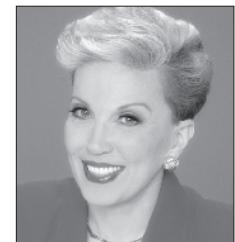
(12) RIGID GENDER ROLES: Expects you to serve, obey, remain at home.

(13) SUDDEN MOOD SWINGS: Switches from sweet to violent in minutes.

(14) PAST BATTERING: Admits to hitting a mate in the past, but says the person "made" him (or her) do it.

(15) THREATS OF VIOLENCE: Says things like, "I'll break your neck," or "I'll kill you," and then dismisses them with, "Everybody talks that way," or, "I didn't really mean it."

Dear Abby is written by Abigail Van Buren, also known as Jeanne Phillips, and was founded by her mother, Pauline Phillips. Write Dear Abby at www.DearAbby.com or P.O. Box 69440, Los Angeles, CA 90069.



Dear Abby



Pastimes





TRIBUNE SPORTS SCORES

MLB STANDINGS

AMERICAN LEAGUE

East Division

| | W | L | Pct. | GB |
|-----------|----|----|------|------|
| New York | 90 | 53 | .629 | - |
| Boston | 86 | 56 | .606 | 31/2 |
| Baltimore | 65 | 76 | .461 | 24 |
| Tampa Bay | 61 | 80 | .433 | 28 |
| Toronto | 59 | 84 | .413 | 31 |

Central Division

| | | | | |
|-------------|----|----|------|-------|
| Minnesota | 82 | 60 | .577 | - |
| Chicago | 72 | 70 | .507 | 10 |
| Cleveland | 70 | 73 | .490 | 121/2 |
| Detroit | 64 | 77 | .454 | 171/2 |
| Kansas City | 51 | 91 | .359 | 31 |

Yesterday's Games

| |
|---------------------------------|
| Minnesota 8, Detroit 5 |
| N.Y. Yankees 9, Baltimore 7 |
| Texas 7, Toronto 6 |
| Tampa Bay 7, Kansas City 2 |
| Seattle 2, Boston 0 |
| Anaheim 11, Chicago White Sox 0 |
| Oakland 1, Cleveland 0 |

NATIONAL LEAGUE

East Division

| | | | | |
|--------------|----|----|------|-------|
| Atlanta | 84 | 58 | .592 | - |
| Florida | 74 | 65 | .532 | 81/2 |
| Philadelphia | 74 | 69 | .517 | 101/2 |
| New York | 61 | 81 | .430 | 23 |
| Montreal | 59 | 83 | .415 | 25 |

Central Division

| | | | | |
|------------|----|----|------|-------|
| St. Louis | 94 | 48 | .662 | - |
| Chicago | 76 | 64 | .543 | 17 |
| Houston | 78 | 66 | .542 | 17 |
| Pittsburgh | 66 | 77 | .462 | 281/2 |
| Cincinnati | 65 | 77 | .458 | 29 |
| Milwaukee | 62 | 79 | .440 | 311/2 |

West Division

| | | | | |
|-------------|----|----|------|---|
| Los Angeles | 83 | 59 | .585 | - |
|-------------|----|----|------|---|

NFL STANDINGS

AFC

East

| | W | L | T | Pct. |
|-------------|---|---|---|-------|
| N.Y. Jets | 1 | 0 | 0 | 1.000 |
| New England | 1 | 0 | 0 | 1.000 |
| Buffalo | 0 | 1 | 0 | .000 |
| Miami | 0 | 1 | 0 | .000 |

North

| | | | | |
|------------|---|---|---|-------|
| Cleveland | 1 | 0 | 0 | 1.000 |
| Pittsburgh | 1 | 0 | 0 | 1.000 |
| Baltimore | 0 | 1 | 0 | .000 |
| Cincinnati | 0 | 1 | 0 | .000 |

South

| | | | | |
|--------------|---|---|---|-------|
| Jacksonville | 1 | 0 | 0 | 1.000 |
| Tennessee | 1 | 0 | 0 | 1.000 |
| Houston | 0 | 1 | 0 | .000 |
| Indianapolis | 0 | 1 | 0 | .000 |

West

| | | | | |
|-------------|---|---|---|-------|
| Denver | 1 | 0 | 0 | 1.000 |
| San Diego | 1 | 0 | 0 | 1.000 |
| Kansas City | 0 | 1 | 0 | .000 |
| Oakland | 0 | 1 | 0 | .000 |

NFC

East

| | | | | |
|--------------|---|---|---|-------|
| Philadelphia | 1 | 0 | 0 | 1.000 |
| Washington | 1 | 0 | 0 | 1.000 |
| Dallas | 0 | 1 | 0 | .000 |

West

| | | | | |
|-------------|---|---|---|------|
| N.Y. Giants | 0 | 1 | 0 | .000 |
|-------------|---|---|---|------|

North

Yesterday's Games

South

West

Final Round

(x-Won on third playoff hole)

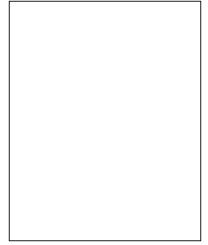
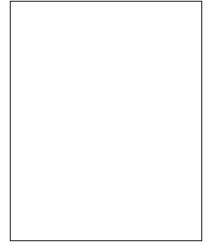
| | | |
|------------------|-------------|-----|
| x-Vijay Singh | 68-66-72-69 | 275 |
| Mike Weir | 68-65-70-72 | 275 |
| Joe Ogilvie | 70-69-69-69 | 277 |
| Justin Rose | 70-70-75-63 | 278 |
| Hunter Mahan | 72-69-69-68 | 278 |
| Stewart Cink | 72-68-69-69 | 278 |
| Robert Damron | 72-71-70-66 | 279 |
| Mark Hensby | 70-69-70-71 | 280 |
| Jesper Parnevik | 69-66-71-74 | 280 |
| Billy Andrade | 67-75-71-68 | 281 |
| David Sutherland | 69-72-68-72 | 281 |
| D.J. Brigman | 67-74-67-73 | 281 |
| Pat Perez | 68-68-78-68 | 282 |

贝尔加拿大公开赛

Final Round

(x-Won on third playoff hole)

| | | |
|--------------------|-------------|-----|
| David Branshaw | 71-65-75-71 | 282 |
| Dean Wilson | 71-70-69-72 | 282 |
| Steve Lowery | 70-69-70-73 | 282 |
| Cliff Kresge | 69-70-67-76 | 282 |
| Jose Caceres | 72-70-74-67 | 283 |
| Arjun Atwal | 71-67-75-70 | 283 |
| Kenny Perry | 71-67-74-71 | 283 |
| Glen Day | 70-69-70-74 | 283 |
| Bill Haas | 71-71-67-74 | 283 |
| Casey Wittenberg | 73-72-71-68 | 284 |
| Chris DiMarco | 69-71-73-71 | 284 |
| Craig Perks | 70-72-75-68 | 285 |
| Bob Tway | 74-71-70-70 | 285 |
| Roland Thatcher | 72-72-71-70 | 285 |
| Corey Pavin | 73-70-72-70 | 285 |
| Bill Glasson | 72-70-73-70 | 285 |
| Joey Sindelar | 66-73-74-72 | 285 |
| Brett Quigley | 69-71-73-72 | 285 |
| Chad Campbell | 73-68-72-72 | 285 |
| David Peoples | 69-70-73-73 | 285 |
| Craig Barlow | 67-69-75-74 | 285 |
| Dudley Hart | 72-73-73-68 | 286 |
| David Edwards | 72-69-74-71 | 286 |
| Richard S. Johnson | 73-70-71-72 | 286 |
| Roger Tambellini | 71-71-69-75 | 286 |
| David Frost | 73-71-71-72 | 287 |
| Jason Bohn | 73-70-72-72 | 287 |
| Davis Love III | 72-73-68-74 | 287 |
| Greg Chalmers | 71-7 | |



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